



## Relocation Dilemma: Social and Cultural Challenges in the Relocation of the Victims of Mount Rokatenda Disaster

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### Abstract

Mount Rokatenda has erupted several times, and brought about impacts on people in Palue Island, Sikka regency, East Nusa Tenggara. Since 1980, various attempts of disaster management through relocation have been carried out by the government, church, and non-governmental organizations. Unfortunately, the efforts to relocate the victims mainly failed because they always return to Palue Island. The threats of Mount Rokatenda and its vulnerability do not seemingly inhibit them to continue their lives there. This is evident in relocation attempt post-eruption in 2012-2013. The question is, how could the social and cultural aspects of Rokatenda victims hinder the relocation program? This ethnographic qualitative research which is done through in-depth interview and observation in April to May 2014 demonstrate that disaster events could also be cultural events. The emic aspect of the victims influence disaster management attempts, especially in the relocation program to the Besar Island. There is a feeling of secure and a sense of security from the ancestors, a view of prosperity for those who stay, and a strong value system that Palue Island is the place of birth, life and death has strongly bound the mythology and cosmology relationship of Palue people with their land. A re-interpretation of emic values through involving local traditional leaders is a strategic step towards the success of Rokatenda relocation program.

**Keywords:** *Rokatenda, Palue Island; relocation; victims; emic culture*

### INTRODUCTION

Behind the exotic nature and diverse culture, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT afterwards) and the majority of the middle territory of Indonesia (except Borneo) and other East Indonesia face lethal disaster threats. The island lies on meeting of Eurasia, Australia and Hindia plates, which results in intense volcanic phenomena. At least there are 23 active volcanoes in this area (ESDM 2014; BNPB 2015). Earthquake is also the result of collisions amongst the earth plates. Due to its position in between two main oceans, it is also vulnerable to tsunami and tectonic earthquake. In addition, landslide frequently follows earthquake if seen from its mountainous topography and land movement.

Along with natural disasters, human

behaviours also contribute in rendering disasters possible. Malaria plague, dengue fever, forest fires, famine, and drought are disasters caused by nature and human involvement. This last kind of disaster hits NTT quite often. WHO annual report positions NTT as one province which possesses the lowest health quality in Indonesia. It is similar with West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) and Papua (Kemkes 2013). The Human Development Index (HDI) in 2009 ranks NTT number 31 regarding life expectancy, literacy, schooling, real expenses, and per capita expenditure so that the province has the poorest HDI (BPS 2013).

With this lowest HDI and high disaster threats, the majority of NTT people are also vulnerable. The vulnerability can be overar-

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ching that embraces economic aspect, livelihood, infrastructure, social, culture, and so on. If disaster happens, with the low competence of the society, the risks of the threats are even higher. Consequently, people are at risks and it is difficult for them to recover. This phenomenon is evident in the eruption of Mount Rokatenda in Sikka regency.

Rokatenda is a name given to a volcano in Palue Island, Sikka Regency, NTT. All area in this island is part of the landscape of Mount Rokatenda. It is so because the width and breadth of the island is similar to with the mount that extends from the edge of the sea up to the mountain. The foot of the mountain is adjacent to the edge of the sea. The slope is around 30 degrees, so that it is hard to find a flat area even as wide as a football field in Palue Island. For housing, they need to flatten the slope or mountain-side, or they build stage house whose pillars adjust the degree of the slope. For regency offices and village offices, the government deliberately flattens the tilt land so that the buildings are even and do not need any stage and pillars.

When facing such natural conditions, the people in Palue Island or those who stay on Mount Rokatenda have different competence as compared to other people. They grow and eat Palue roots which are big and rich of carbohydrate. In terms of water, they use distillation system of sulfur water and collecting dews for drinking and daily washing. When they face Rokatenda eruption, not only they hide in safe spots, they also perform several traditions believed to save them from the eruption.

According to the history, Rokatenda is an active volcano. It erupts enormously every ten years, and once in two years for a smaller scale. Some sources and informants explain that the greatest eruption hit in 2012 and 10 August 2013, 16 January 2005, 23 March 1985, 1981, and 4 August – 25 September 1928 (Global Volcanism Program 2005-2013); some available information also mention in 1971, 1963, 1953, and 1940, although they did not heavily impact on the wider society. Unfortunately, information about eruption after those years is not widely avail-

able. While eruptions with smaller scale intensely happened in 2013, 2008, 2002 and so on. According to the information, those small eruptions hit every one to three years. This situation is worsened by the volcanic activities, such as collapsing crater wall, crater collapse, and so on. Data received from PMVG (ESDM 2014) state that the history of Rokatenda eruption is as follows: 1650, 1928, 1963, 1972, 1973, 1980, 1984, 1985, and 2012/2013.

Every eruption impacts on its surroundings, including human beings who inhabit the mountainback. In a small intensity, the risk of being exposed from hot ash cloud and weather pollution is the most common phenomena, as compared to being hit by lava flow in a bigger scale eruption. People need to remember that there are at least three massive eruptions that urge them to evacuate and relocate to other island. During the Rokatenda eruptions in 1980s, people in three villages in Palue Island had to evacuate to the Northern seashore of Flores Island, in Ende and Sikka Regency. People in five other villages managed to survive and stayed in Palue.

There were at least 1000 refugees to be relocated from their houses, because most of their houses were crushed by the hot lava. They then decided to relocate to Ende and Sikka, although in couple of years, around 70% of those victims went back to Palue. They stayed at the abandoned gardens or choosing new places in the five other villages which were not heavily affected by the eruption in 1980. Some old villages were revitalized. The first relocation in that 1980 was considered fail.

Another lethal eruption hit in 1985. The eruption affected seven villages, they were the previous three villages hit in 1980, and four other villages which did not crash by the eruption in 1980. It can be said that lava had been flowed out of the “containment”. According to locals, some crater walls were broken, so that lava flowed out of its containment. The destruction it made was catastrophic, although it did not claim any lives. The locals evacuated to villages which could not be reached by the eruption based

on wind direction and lava flow, and some others reached other lands in other islands. Destruction or material losses in the forms of houses, properties, livestock, and plants were massive.

After the disaster, wandering phenomenon (*towe system*) to Malaysia and Singapore started. Some people who stay in Palue follow their parents who work overseas before. Generally they work in agriculture, and many of them working as fishing boat crews or barge ship in Malaysia. This is followed by those who are evacuating, although very little of them. When disaster hits, no formal relocation program conducted by the government. People choose to move to other area according to their daily needs.

In the beginning of 2005, eruption in lethal scale happened. But because the former path of lava flow had long been abandoned, as they reflected on the previous eruption crashing the spots, infrastructure damages and casualties could be avoided. This, however, does not mean that the locals are more ready or alert towards disaster, rather, they only want to avoid the volcanic affected area. Unfortunately, some years after 1985, many local residents returned to their respective places. Finally, at the end of 2012 and beginning of 2013, Rokatenda lethally exploded. Lava flow crashed half of the island, even pushed sea line to the middle, and built a new land. 11 casualties were identified, and many more were wounded. Thousands of people were evacuated to Sikka and Ende regencies, or sent to the available shelters or victim relocation area of eruption in 1980.

The handling and management of the latest disaster relief is considered the worst, because there is a transition of government leadership of Sikka regency. The archbishop of Maumere Catholic Church and other NGOs such as Humanitarian Forum of Indonesia (HFI), *Dompot Dhuafa* (DD), Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Center (MDMC), World Vision Indonesia (WVI), Yogyakarta Emergency Unit (YEU) and others are more active in conducting the post-disaster management, or mentoring the post-disaster reconstruction process.

According to the decision of Regent and Task Force of disaster relief of Rokatenda in August 2013, Palue Island where Mount Rokatenda lies needs to be emptied, and all the local residents should be relocated to other island. Some other places are offered, such as Hewuli (relocation site in 1980s), Watu meriah (50 km from Hewuli), and Besar Island. While those refugees at Ende regency, Sikka government will coordinate them to seek a relocation area in Ende, either by buying land or seeking for grants from local government. All relocation attempts of these victims until the end of 2014 have not been well organized, especially the relocation to Besar Island.

Government attempt to carry out this relocation has been considered as useless program. The locals are not convinced of its success. This is based on the previous relocation case in 1980s, although it was managed by the soldiers and then delegated to local government and church, there were many refugees who returned to Palue Island. Moreover, the locals think that the current government is not responsive, as evident from the evacuation case and the management of disaster relief after the latest eruption.

In the eye of the central government, such as the Indonesian *National* Board for Disaster Management (BNPB), at the heart of the disaster management problem in Sikka is a consequence of the un-responsiveness of Sikka regency. This is the main and only problem of the failure of Rokatenda disaster relief programs, especially in relocation program to Hewuli and Besar Island. Actually, other than disaster management issue, there are social cultural factors that are obviously seen that to play a key role in conducting relocation program for the Rokatenda refugees. The question is, how has the social cultural factors been embodied and implemented by Rokatenda refugees could influence disaster relief management, especially regarding the refugee relocation program?

## RESEARCH METHODS

This paper is a qualitative inquiry based

on anthropologic approach which aims to explain the social cultural aspects influencing the relocation issues and other disaster relief matters. This research was carried out in Sikka regency, especially areas which become the shelters such as Hewuli, Transito, the regent office, Kampung Batu, and Bajo seashore community. In addition, Besar Island and other area in Ende Regency are investigated to gather facts about the wide-spreadness of the refugees, relocation spots offered by the government, and local community supports. In-depth interviews are conducted to 38 refugees, 12 NGO facilitators, six Priests and other church activists, Maumere Archbishop, five local government leaders, three *mosa* men who represent local leaders, and three businessmen who are involved in 'Flores Friends' program. Data and information is then filtered, categorized, analysed, and interpreted by looking at their interconnectedness. After that, reporting and writing is done by considering the urgency and priority.

The research framework is based on the relationship between disaster management and cultural aspects embedded on the affected locals. As widely understood that disaster carries with them losses and damages, especially for those inhabiting the vicinity. Several initiatives and efforts in managing disasters have been done, as seen in the steps of management disaster.

The steps of disaster mitigation is considered the most significant, because this step can prevent and mitigate the future disaster risks. The process of raising awareness and socialization for the incoming threats and its mitigation could be done before they come. Response step is the step of relief after the disaster happens. This step aims to overcome emergency and saving people as soon as possible. This step is characterized by the readiness and alertness of disaster relief crews. Government, people and company supports will materialize here for the sake of the disaster relief success.

The last step in disaster relief management is reconstruction process after disaster (Coburn 1994). This step consists of many activities. Generally, there are two major

activities, i.e. livelihood development and housing reconstruction. Relocation is one of the most important alternative, if an affected area do not meet the criteria of housing and living standard.

Livelihood development focuses on the recovery of disaster victims in terms of their living, which comprises of working, life orientation, and accessibility to service and possibility to prosper (Ellis 1998; Sudrajat 2016). In this aspect, humanitarian organizations and government would generally organize related training and provide funding for the victims to start a business (Maarif 2010). The activity is adjusted to the 'normal condition' of the economic behavior of those affected before the disaster strike. This means, if the victim was a farmer, then the livelihood will also be agriculture based. But in its development, this livelihood activity considers the surrounding or ecological environment where the victims currently live. Therefore, this livelihood program will pay attention to the situation of housing reconstruction as well as its ecological environment. Even the cultural aspects of the affected community are counted to increase the success of the reconstruction program, both for the relocation as well as the livelihood (Abdullah 2006; 2007).

Unfortunately, in running the reconstruction program, either relocation or housing reconstruction, challenges frequently appear. Technical problems usually deal with availability of land, funding, building materials, and workforce. Substantial problem lies in the attitude of the locals whether they accept the two reconstruction options offered. Most people hesitate when they have to be relocated to new places, because they have a strong bond with the former places. The bond could be in the form of primordialism, cosmology, mythology or economy with the former area along with the other locals.

Substantial problems may also come from new places, where relocation program will be done. The rejection towards relocation in a new place may come from the locals of the new places. This rejection is obvious. Reasons for this might be about social cultu-

ral aspects, such as differences in ethnicity, religion, language, and social status. Therefore, relocation problems do not necessarily mean infrastructure and housing design for the victims, but it also deals with social cultural aspects from many stakeholders. Finally, understanding towards disaster as well as disaster management is not restricted towards physical and technical matters, but also social cultural aspects. Because when disaster hits, it is actually an anthropological and ethnographic event, as human becomes the most exposed of the disaster impacts.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Rokatenda: Between Myths and Facts

Rokatenda, for a name of a mountain, is unique. This name is different as compared to other mountain in NTT such as Tambora or those outside NTT such as “Merapi, Marapi, Lokon, Semeru, Mahawu, etc”. The name suggests a specificity, both in terms of its pronunciation and meaning. In terms of pronunciation, many languages in NTT, and including Palue language as spoken by Palue people as the inhabitants of Palue Island, is a non-Austronesia. This kind of language emphasizes more on the word ‘F’, or its humming pronunciation in its words, such as *fue’ mehel* (betel nut). Whereas in terms of meaning, it is interesting to note that the myth of the mountain is mythical and told through stories of local ritual beliefs.

The root of the mountain’s name is divided into two words, i.e. *Roka* and *Tenda*. But it is pronounced as a word, that is *Rokatenda*. The word *Roka* is derived from the word *Rogoe*; and *Tenda* is from *Sengga*. Besides dialect, the way the locals speak the language is influenced by *Lio* language, those two words is the result of code mixing from the available languages. Two separate words which then become one word is seemingly tracing the names of certain figures in Palue mythology (Vischer 1996; 2009).

Some information given by the former leader of Nitunglea village, that in 1980s, Mount Rokatenda was believed as the settlement of Palue ancestors or new places of

those who passed away. In a simple English, it served as the cemetery (Interview 5 April 2014). They talked to each other there, and it became the meeting point for predecessors and their descendants. This site of communication between the predecessors and their descendants have been arranged by the local custom. Therefore, if Mount Rokatenda erupts, it is simply interpreted that the predecessors are there and the descendants should take care of them.

It is widely believed in this local tradition that in order for those predecessors not to seek for attention, the descendants need to present the slaughtered head of a buffalo in certain places as an offering. The slaughtering process of this buffalo should be accompanied by rituals at certain time and should be followed by Palue people. Therefore, the role of *mosa laki* (male *mosa*), a name for local leaders according to their custom legitimation, is emphasized on reading the will of the ancestors, and connecting to communicating the will of the ancestors and their descendants. This tie is stronger when the *laki mosa* use their mythical power. The slaughtering of buffalo, spells, special places and offering rituals comply with animisme and dynamism beliefs in the hunting age.

Let us have a look at one kind of spell that positions their ancestors in pedestal, and are considered as the determinant of their prosperity.

Hinama pu mori  
Ra bola wola tana  
Ancestors, please help us  
So that we can reap the harvest  
(Interview with Pak Nya, 4 April 2014)

There are seven villages in Palue Island which makes the buffalo head offering, i.e. Nndeo, Lei, Tomu, Cavalo, Koa, Nitung, and Cua. This deals with the land. There are only three villages which cover the top of Rokatenda, i.e. Cawalo, Koa and Nitung. A bigger ceremony made in Koa (Vischer 2009). This ritual is described vividly in an ethnographic movie by Michael P. Vischer (1996), *Contestations: Dynamics of Precedence in an Eastern Indonesia domain, To’a*,



*Palue Island*. In the movie, the *laki mosa* leads the prayer and spell reciting for the buffalo head. Several times, he mentions about Rokatenda. The film production is supported by The International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden, the Netherlands and the Australian National University's Ethnographic Film Laboratory Department of Anthropology, RSPAS.

Through this kind of ceremony, mythological perception and bond towards ecological system and structure is then strongly built. They believe that the Self (as a Palue being), should return to Palue, whatever it takes. It is embedded in the daily practices of the locals, for example, when a Palue person passes away outside Palue Island, other Palue people are obliged to return the corpse to Palue Island. But, due to the expensive cost of corpse shipping from overseas, for example from Malaysia, then the other Palue people must bring the dead's hair, teeth, and fingers. The body representatives need to be delivered by the neighbours or friends to the relatives in Palue.

It is believed that if the body remnants returned to Palue, then the spirit will follow and stay with the ancestors' spirits in Palue Island (Interview with Anny and Gysho, 2 April 2014). Such a cosmological perspective will hamper the relocation process of disaster victims of Mount Rokatenda from Palue Island, besides of course the delay of technical matters of victim identification, funding

and housing area for relocation done by the government and NGOs. Even though the two things have been ensured by the central government and funding availability of *Sahabat Flores*.

Rokatenda and Palue, are two different thing but belong to the one place (Picture 1). Rokatenda is a name of a mountain, whereas Palue is a name of an Island where the mountain lies. Although it is called as an island, it is unlike any other island with flatland. It can be concluded that the whole island is the slope of Rokatenda, so that there is almost no flatland in the island. Rokatenda and Palue have their own myths, although they both are connected to each other. There are many information about this myth, both told by the locals or folklore. The truth of the stories is relative, but at least they describe that these mythical aspects are from old beliefs (animisme and dynamism) and Hinduism also influences the pre- or post-growth of church there.

Mythologically, Mount Rokatenda was not a mountain, nor volcano. It instead a place for the goddesses (*anjo*) to take a bath. Such a place was called *komo ca* or a big lake, a bathtub and playground for the locals and other creatures. Here, the King and Queen who were the descendants meditate to purify themselves so that they could avoid from all bad deeds. The King was a young handsome gentle man. There were many obstacles and challenges in the meditation,



Source: [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), 29 April 2014

**Picture 1.** Illustration of Mount Rokatenda in the middle of the Sea

including the angels or *anjo* from Heaven (Interview with *laki mosa* Bm, 7 April 2014).

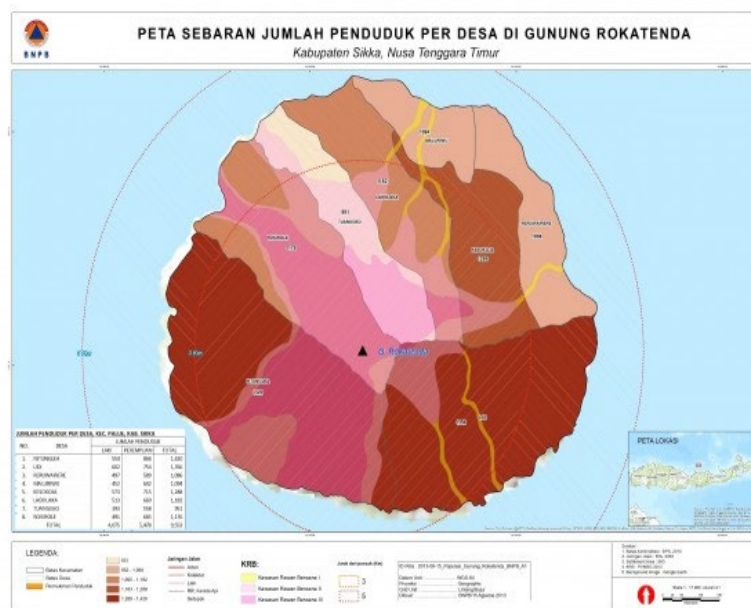
One of the *anjo* who adored the King flirted with him when he is meditating. Because the King did not reckon *Sali Molo* (one of the *anjo* which means pure), then the *anjo* hugged and caressed the King who was meditating. The angel forgot that she was sent by God to secure the King. Knowing what she did, the God got angry. Then there was a rumbling in the sky, it was a curse. Thomas Teki in <http://footnote.blogspot.com>, described the myth as follows:

“Hey you a creature full of lust, it is you who wanted to be a man on earth forever, as other human beings. Your name, *Sali Molo*, and people will call you as Sali, means an outcast. Whereas you, pointing at the King, is a tough man in purification attempt, but your charm has tarnished the place. For that reason, I will change your charm into something scared by people (*Palue*), and it will be in this scary place (*Palue*). Since today, your whole body will be covered by hair. But, you’re your kindness will be remembered by people. This cursed place will become a volcano as a remember for people here about your dirtiness, especially *Sali Molo*. Things will change as I instruct it”

After a rumbling strange sound, the King opened his eyes and witness everything changed as instructed. The King saw a woman beside him and said, “Go and do as instructed. I will be here with my sibling in Mount Baru”. The curse instantly changed everything. The former of village leader in Palue Island in 1980s explained that the beautiful lake which was known as Rokaten-da changed into Mount Rokatenda.

Mount Rokatenda since then was known as an active volcano, and even the whole area of Palue Island is the mountain slope of Rokatenda. The name of the island of which Mount Rokatenda lies is called Palue, something scary, although factually there are other meanings, that is *mba’lue*, a Bugis word which means liberating or leaving her (See further in Humaedi, *Jurnal Jnana BN-PST Bali 2016*, “Komunitas Rokatenda: Silang Budaya Bugis dan Asli di Pulau Palue NTT”).

Beside the version of the King and *anjo*, there is also another version on King Rembu dan King Rokatenda who were siblings, and became another myth for Rokatenda. There were two kings who competed for a throne. They were siblings, but none of them was understanding. Clonflicts bet-



Source: [www.bnph.go.id](http://www.bnph.go.id), 28 April 2014

Picture 2. Map of Population Distribution in Palue Island

ween them were inevitable so that their parents sent them away to build their own territory. They both left, one to the East, and another one to the West. But when they reached the land, they were actually in one island. Then a critical conflict emerged about territory border.

Then God divided the land in His own way. Because they both were siblings and unseparable, then they were placed in one area. To make the long story short, King Rembu was given a place or island, whereas his sibling was given the role to anchor so that the island did not move. The anchor was a mountain. This way could resolve the conflicts between the two brothers. King Rembu was another name of Palue Island, whereas King Rokatenda conquered the mountain.

The first and second myths are the name of villages represent the story of God and goddess. According to the story, Sali who reincarnated from *anjo* into human being went to the North and stayed there. The place is now called Sali village. This is the legend of Mount Rokatenda. There is another village called Rokirole. It means a seat, where the King sat when he was being flirted.

The second myth about King Rembu and King Rokatenda is associated with the name of the territory. They have different power, but belong to one place. Through this myth, the Palue people believe that although they are different in terms of socio economic status and language, it does not mean that they are separated in terms of family and social life (Interview with Yosep, 7 April 2014).

Palue people believe that those born in Palue are siblings, they are the descendants of King Remba and King Rokatenda who are also associated with the goddesses, such as *Sali Moli*. This belief becomes the main argument why the posture and language of Palue are different with other NTT people in general. There is an opinion that Palue is the descendant of Bugis people. From Sulawesi, they spread out to other lands such as Sunda strait, Banda sea, and Pacific ocean. One of which is Palue, moreover when there is a si-

milarity between Palue language and Bugis language.

### **Disaster is a Cultural Event: Cultural Aspect in the Midst of Relocation Problems**

Some growing myths are important to note as emic data about the views of Palue people on volcanic eruption, and their hesitance to relocate from Palue. Myth has developed inter-generationally about 10 years, so that it forms a belief and spiritual bond that cannot be easily penetrated even by religion under the Catholic Church. In terms of disaster, as mentioned above, Palue belief considers that explosion is only a signifier of existence and the will of the ancestors to be noted as a worship. Meanwhile, the Church and their followers play important roles in the process of disaster relief management in Sikka and Ende regency, and they use theological perspective and logical and scientific way of thinking.

The Church believes that Rokatenda eruption is similar to other mountains, as a consequence of magma blockage underneath the earth. This blockage is opened along with the tectonic fracture or volcanic phenomena. Only God knows when the fracture occurred, human cannot predict it. However, human has the capacity to read the signs, either from chronology or other symptoms. To strengthen the view about Rokatenda disaster, Caritas Maumere, as the continuation of the Archdiocese of Maumere, always gather information, data and knowledge on Rokatenda eruption from related stakeholders, such as Rokatenda Volcanic Observation Post in Ropa of Ende regency, and Centre of Volcanology in Bandung. They also consult to volcanologist such as Dr. Eko Teguh Paripurno. This information is then disseminated to the followers through worship meeting, bible study, and social meeting at the level of church, parochy, or archbishop. The assumption is that the followers will have a basic knowledge on disaster with the leaders. The assumption, however, is not all correct. Many followers have their own views in seeing or interpreting the disaster.

Palue people, who are Catholic belie-



vers in majority, around 95% out of its residents, also choose other perspectives, such as the belief about the existence of the pre-dessecors in Mouth Rokatenda. Although the Catholic Church tries minimize the mythical viewpoints on disaster, but it seemingly fail. In some cases, the Church accommodate local elements, but it is limited, because there is a concern of inculturation which will render the religious teaching heretic (Interview with Priest A, 2 April 2014).

The buffalo head offering case of the Palue in the eighth month led by the *Laki Mosa* is one concern from the Church. They want to change the model and ritual. But they fail. They present the buffalo head in the ceremony of sacrificial annode, along with the ceremony with the ancestors. All Palue cannot cut trees and other agricultural activities. If they insist to do that during the month, there is a belief that disaster will come, and Mount Rokatenda will ask for victims from Palue people (Interview with Mr. Kop, 8 April 2014).

Such a phenomenon is not only found in the senior group or those born in 1980s, but also in Rokatenda refugees 2012. For them, the Church has given the knowledge and belief about God and its universal religious value system. Whereas the belief that they got from the collective experience with other local people will be the private and communal value system. The Church generally makes them to be a good person and the local belief will lead them to individual and communal safety, so that they could be accepted in the social life.

To them, disbelieving the tradition and intergenerational belief will make them suffer physically and psychologically. Social anomaly is one concern for them, whereas disapproval from ancestors is a real punishment because they are the ones who secure and prosper them. They will behave and position themselves according to the place they belong. If it is related to religion, they will behave as the common Catholic. If it deals with tradition and local belief agreed by Palue people, they will take and follow the local elements although it opposes the Church teaching (Interview with Caritas faci-

litator, 10 April 2014).

The above phenomena are not a balance concept, where they combine the teaching of the Church with the Nature as previously learnt. This phenomenon is the effort to balance oneself between internalising the religion and tradition, moreover with the social norms in NTT, that "religion comes from the sea, whereas tradition appears from the earth" (Humaedi 2013, p. 17). Even, if this wisdom is applied on the behavior, then Palue will take tradition and habits that exist in the society. For them, what comes from the ancestors will bring positive values which secure and prosper them, including in handling the disaster threats from the surrounding.

If such a perspective towards disaster is transferred inter-generationally, then it will create a viewpoint and practice that is similar with those in handling disaster relief in Rokatenda. The emic culture about disaster becomes a concern in disaster mitigation and relief for Palue people. Understanding this emic culture will lead us to understand the way the Palue people think, and to formulate the strategies to assist the disaster victims that are culturally responsive.

As mentioned previously, Mount Rokatenda is a very active volcano. It erupts lethally and destroys Palue Island. In 1985 for example, a massive explosion hit the Island. Lava flowed to the area that was later abandoned by the people in 1980s. It claimed many casualties and material losses. This does not mean that the people were ready or alert with disaster, but because the former area were already abandoned due to the previous eruption. Unfortunately, some years after 1985, many local people including those of neighbouring area and relocated in Maumere, returned to their respective places slowly but surely.

There were some factors that encourage them to return and reside in their old locations. *Firstly*, there was a view their old place is safe, because the lava did not flow there or the concentration of the hot cloud and ashes was low. This was believed as the result of the buffalo head they offered which was led by *laki mosa* every year. Palue Island

finally was considered as safe from the Rokatenda eruption, as long as the people believed about the rituals. With this belief they also believed that the lava flow was moved by the God to the other slope of Mount Rokatenda. This was seen from the lava which did not pass through the village in 1982 eruption, it even went to the four villages which became the most vulnerable villages.

*Secondly*, there is a belief that Palue Island was the place of living and growing for the Palue people guaranteed its safety and prosperity by God. This belief was strengthened by the social economic condition which got better year by year, although sometimes hit by the eruption. To be true, that situation was not actually from the belief, but more on the money distribution in Palue as a result of those working overseas after 1985s.

*Thirdly*, the held belief that Palue was the place of birth, life, and death of the real Palue people for those relocated. Moreover they had to live together with the ancestors if they want to prosper. This last view is closely connected with the second view that those go work overseas, in the beginning stay and dare to be in Palue. Although it is different to live in Palue and overseas, they already got the blessing from the ancestors to live prosperously. This view was followed by other Palue who relocate or still occupy the relocation outside Palue.

Since 1992s, three villages in the Vulnerable Area grew to be a community area of both the relocated people and the new comers from other vulnerable area. They started to build houses, either from selling their old houses or relocated in Hewuli, or from working in Maumere or overseas. The old gardens and fields were re-opened and revitalized, although before they stay there, they work their old fields and gardens.

After 2000s, the management got more intense, moreover with the stronger belief. Little by little, housing in the vulnerable area re-appears. They seemingly are not afraid of the frequent eruption in Rokatenda in small scale. For them, the small eruption is just a warning from the ancestors. If there is a big eruption, they are certain that the ancestors

will help them, because the 'explosion' is just the reminder that "ancestors will come" and live around them. Finally, the re-opening of vulnerable area I-III continue to grow until 2007, and people continue to run their life as usual like before 1980s.

In 2012 and 2013, when Palue people, especially in the vulnerable villages, thought that the small eruptions were common, until the lethal explosion happened. This eruption was as huge as the 1980s eruption. Hot ashes covered the whole mountain slope, the lava flow was strong and dispersed. It run to to all four villages (vulnerable area I, II, and III). Even the big lava stream went into 300 meter depth of the sea, and the small stream passed around two kilometers.

This happened because the rocks on top of Rokatenda cracked, and then formed a new lava flow. Consequently, the three villages in vulnerable area I, i.e. Nitunglea, Rokirole and Lidi flattened by the hot lava. Fortunately, when the hot ashes happened for the first time, people evacuated independently. This quick response enabled the locals to save themselves. 11 people were identified died, due to delayed evacuation. One day after the hot ashes, lava flowed from the top of the mountain to all mountain slope, especially to the lava natural paths.

Material losses, such as houses, property, livestock, and plants were immense. Since 1992, economic recovery and growth of Palue community come from working overseas. Years of hard work were pointless due to the eruption. The view that eruption is common and that it is the proof that "ancestors are there with them" lead to stronger risks in the midts of danger and disaster in Palue.

The last point is interesting. Not only that it deals with the belief of the people, it is substantially crucial, at least from the perspective of the Church. It can be concluded that, to prove the belief about ancestors, they reckon that Palue people breach the teaching of the Church. Catholic Church has parochially made people aware the activities that breach the religious teaching, that is Catholicism, especially dealing with the tradition of buffalo head as the offering led by

laki mosa, and some beliefs about the prohibition to work on agriculture in certain seasons. There are elements or local beliefs which oppose Catholic teaching and it is the duty of the Church to make sure that their followers are far from those. Meanwhile, if the social cultural system and lived experience of the customs and tradition do not oppose the Church teaching, then the Church could inculturate it into the Church.

In the attempt of preventing religious breaching, the Church and religious leaders face many difficulties. The effort to raise people awareness is not as strong as the people's compliance towards laki mosa, as their leader. A Palue acknowledges that one part of him is a Catholic and will comply with the Priest and other followers. He will do what he can do to apply the religious teaching. But he cannot fully meet the Church's will to dismantle the custom from his ancestors. The words from laki mosa about customs are mandatory and he needs to do whatever it takes to get involved in the instructed rituals. Being involved in the rituals for Palue people is "an attempt to gain blessing to prosper and save themselves from disaster, including Rokatenda eruption" (Interview with Mt. Raman, 10 April 2014).

It is interesting to note here, when on the hand that the Palue people had done what the laki mosa instructed, but Mount Rokatenda still erupted and even it affected the Palue people in many villages on the top and underneath the mountain. They even believed that it happened because many Palue people breached the customs when they must had been silent in a particular period. Before the latest eruption happened, for example, many Palue cut down trees in the silent period. Many Palue expected to get more buffalo meat, in which the buffalo belongs to the ancestors. This means that there is an awareness that Mount Rokatenda erupts and brings about detrimental effects, because they have made mistakes in carrying out their customs. Rokatenda eruption is finally understood not as physically a mountain that needs to act as volcano, but they blame themselves as the inhabitants

and guardians which render the mountain exploding.

This kind of understanding is strange if seen from positivistic logic and pure science. Under this framework, a volcano will explode if vulcanologically and tectonically find a moment when the magma blockage opens. There is no role whatsoever of its environment to prevent and stop the volcanic activities. The volcanic eruption is unlike flood which can be predicted or prevented, or even mitigated by human beings. Palue people believe that there is a cosmic relationship between Self (human being), ancestors, and God. Mount Rokatenda is merely a "symbol" and "proof" from the harmonious relation. If they could synchronize themselves with the old rituals, it will result in the form of blessing from God and ancestors. Then, the mountain will be friendly and reduce its dangerous activities which threatens people.

The question is, why does not the mountain offer prosperity for those who believe it as a symbol and proof, when they have met all the requirements? The symbol of prosperity is generally in the forms of water and fertile land which will produce good crops.

"Mother An replies with a cosmological perspective, that Palue people are blessed with long life and healthy body in the midst of limited water and fertile land. Many Palue people is older than 80 years old. Kids are happy and healthy, despite the limited water. Rokatenda has protected us from the evils, such as diseases and famine. Although not affluent, corn and cassava grow well for food. Although not ordinary, water is available.

Our ancestors have protected us, as long as we take care of them. We are nothing and won't get anything from life, if we cannot make our ancestor's spirit happy in Rokatenda. Palue is the place for us to attain blessing. If water and food is the measurement, in Transito and Hewuli, the evacuation and relocation spots, we have more here. The two basic needs are met, but many people were sick, kids were sick and unhappy, and so on. This means,

water and food cannot guarantee that we will be healthy. We will be healthy when we are blessed by our ancestors in Palue." (Interview with Mother An, 3 April 2013).

Such a cosmological understanding will hamper the disaster mitigation and relief which emphasizes relocation. For Palue people, togetherness in Palue Island, although it is on the top of Mount Rokatenda, is everything. The togetherness is one form of ancestors' blessings which will result in health and safety for Palue people. If there are casualties during the eruption, the victims are inseparable from this togetherness logic between Palue, ancestors and God.

For the government, it becomes a dilemma for the development programs implemented in Palue Island. This is not easy to deal with because all area are under the state of vulnerable area I-III of Rokatenda eruption. If the government wish to build the road across Palue, then it will be destroyed by the high-intensity eruption. If the government provides educational infrastructure, then the buildings will soon damage. In the eye of the government, Palue people cannot stay in Palue as the place of Mount Rokatenda. Therefore, relocation scheme is the main proposal everytime Rokatenda explodes. This scheme has been strongly proposed since 1980s.

For the Palue people, they wish to stay in Palue despite the high risks. They are aware that the island is in emergency state. But it does not mean that they are hopeless. This awareness creates a natural mitigation attempt. The government policy does not make any sense for the locals, because they interpret it differently. For them, government does not have the will and capacity to serve the people. Road is not built, education facilities are not sufficient, health facilities are inadequate, and no water. This different conception explains why Palue is not well developed. The government does not seem like playing its role, because of the dilemma in developing the area.

On the one hand, the locals are able to overcome its limitation, but on the other hand, the government is in paradox. On the

one hand, they need to serve the people, and the other hand, development policies cannot be implemented in the vulnerable area for the people (Interview with the Regional Secretary, 11 April 2014). If the policy is implemented, then it means the government approves that the people will stay there and endorse the catastrophe.

The paradox in the government level is already felt by certain Palue people. They join the relocation program and comply themselves as citizens. But for most of them, they find it difficult to relocate, because they abandon the ancestors and they do no trust the government either. They draw this conclusion from the previous experience during the disaster relief and management in relocation area in Hewuli. They chose to stay in their previous places and tried to survive. They are sure that the blessings from ancestors will make them prosper, at least they have food to eat daily.

This thought is simple, but it brings overarching consequences for whatever programs offered by government and other stakeholders, especially regarding disaster relief and management. This means disaster relief programs which emphasize relocation will fail, not only due to external factors such as government, but also due to internal point of views and social cultural factors for this Rokatenda case. Government and NGOs need to understand this cultural background of Palue when they apply the relocation program to other Island.

## CONCLUSION

Three steps of disaster management: mitigation, response and reconstruction has been implemented during disaster relief for the affected people in Rokatenda, Palue NTT although in limited portion and capacity. In mitigation step, according to the emic perspective of the people, the government was not strong enough so that they cannot prevent or prohibit Palue people occupy vulnerable area I-III. Government and the people seemingly do not learn from the previous Rokatenda eruption, where lava flow and hot ashes covered the whole island. Government could not stop the refugees to



return (those relocated in 1980s in Hewuli) to the vulnerable area I-III in Palue Island.

In the response step, government of Sikka regency was deemed as irresponsible in evacuating and helping the victims post-evacuation when they were in the shelters. Transition and capacity of leaders become the the main reason of the failure of this response. Fortunately, the response from the society at large, the Church and humanitarian organizations could at least reduce the severity level.

In the third stage, *vis a vis* reconstruction, especially re-building houses obviously impacts on the economy. This is not because the structural aspects dealing with leadership, governance, and relocation area availability, but also the cultural aspects strongly held by the Rokatenda victims from Palue Island. This cultural aspect hinders the success of the relocation program in 1980s. It was the time when there were so many relocated victims of Rokatenda in Hewuli and Watumeriah returned to Palue Island after 1985s.

At least there are three cultural aspects which hamper the disaster relief process in the reconstruction stage. Firstly, there is a belief that the buffalo head as an offering to prevent danger which was led by laki mosa has secured Palue from Rokatenda eruption. Secondly, there is a viewpoint that those who stay at Palue will be guaranteed its prosperity; Thirdly, the view and value system of most Palue people that Palue is the place of birth, life, and death. Therefore, they have to live together with the ancestors who already passed away if they want to prosper.

Those three factors become the main problems when faced with reconstruction programs which attempt to move the victims outside Palue Island. The resistance of relocation to Besar Island, for example, one alternative after Hewuli, is not seen from the unreadiness of housing construction in Besar Island, but it has to be understood from the hesitance and rejection by the Palue's belief "they cannot live together with the ancestors". The internalisation of this cultural social value is the most crucial stumbling block in the relocation program.

There is actually a middle ground in terms of culture to ease the relocation program so that it can be accepted by the Rokatenda victims. The affected locals of Rokatenda eruption could accept the program as long as they could get closer or see Mount Rokatenda and Palue Island from their new place. If they cannot be physically close, then it is enough for them to "see the Palue Island and Mount Rokatenda although from distance", although the relocation spot is as arid as Palue Island. Unfortunately, the expected outcome is not administratively in Sikka regency.

The cultural aspect of the victims and combined with other structural aspects complicate the problem even until 2016. The government see this as dilemmatic, on the one hand, returning them to Palue Island means dragging them to be the victims. On the other hand, delaying the relocation program will leave the Rokatenda victims in the emergency situation. The attempt to relocate the victims to Besar Island, as one relocation area is also dilemmatic. Not only that they will return to Palue Island, but they also feel under pressure staying in the Besar Island. For the majority of Rokatenda people, Besar Island is not the expected island according to their emic culture perspective, not to mention the process of licensing and building the houses.

The government (central and regional), the Archbishop of Maumere with the Priests, and Caritas Maumere volunteers, and other NGOs cannot control this cultural and value system held by Rokatenda victims. This hinders the disaster relief management. The question is, when will this situation continue? By what ways a raising-consciousness program could be accepted and realized by Palue people, if the area is totally the mountain slope of an active volcano?

Culturally, relocation program brings with it an ethical aspect, similar to the government policies and programs. Whereas the cultural values such as viewpoint, religion, value system, tradition, social structure, and others are the emic culture which grow in the society. The resistance of etic aspect

by the locals which possess certain emic in which this emic is not well understood. This is as if the etic aspects are the most important, whereas the emic aspects cannot interfere the relocation program.

Understanding and re-interpreting emic values and internalizing strategy need to be re-thought along with running the relocation program. The involvement of laki mosa as the respected local leader is paramount for the sake of the relocation. Their involvement should be based on understanding and re-interpreting of the social cultural aspects growing in the society. The values of intimacy with the ancestors in Palue could be re-interpreted, so that a new point of view could be offered where Palue people still have the bond both mythologically and cosmologically with Palue Island and Mount Rokatenda. If this new perspective is well developed, then the relocation program for the sake of people safety could be done.

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In-depth interview was carried out with the Priests, victims, volunteers, facilitators, and the locals in Palue Island, Besar Island and Maumere and Ende, from 1 April to 27 May 2014.